

5th Sunday of Lent: Go, from now on do not sin anymore!

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126:1-2,2-3,4-5,6; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa,

Greetings to you all with the words of the responsorial psalm, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy" (Psalm 126:3).

The psalmist's recollections of God's saving actions tell us that it is the source of joy, that remembering brings us close to the source of joy, God. As we look recall back on our past, look inside of us, and look around us, there are great things that God has done for us. In particular, it is a joy to know how God reaches down to those who labored in life and the misery of sin.

The gospel's story of a woman caught in adultery tells us about this great act of God. It is a story of undeserved forgiveness. It could be our story of a friend or the story of our family. Jesus stands by with the woman before the condemning Pharisees who use her as bait to test him. The woman is supposed to be stoned to death, but Jesus' compassion is greater than their condemnation. He sets the woman free from the misery of sins.

This forgiveness of our Lord Jesus is worth remembering and pondering as we examine ourselves in relation to God and others.

First, Jesus' words to his listeners. He challenges those who condemned the woman by saying: "anyone of you who does not have sin shall be the first to cast a stone" (Jn 8:7). A person of conscience who hears these words will pause for a moment, for all are tainted by imperfections and sins except the Blessed Virgin Mary. One could be vindictive to the sins of others but dismissive to his/her own; one could quickly condemns others but excuses oneself readily, blame others and easily absolve oneself; readily exact justice to offenders but takes one's wrongdoings lightly. Our sins could blur our vision of others. I love the wisdom of the Liturgy of the Church. We always enter first by recognizing and accepting that we are sinners when we recite the Confiteor. We acknowledged that we have greatly sinned three times and, at the same time, struck our breast three times. The recognition and acceptance that we are sinners proclaim our need for a savior, and just as God listens to the confessions of our sins, we are challenged to listen, know and understand the circumstance of the sinners. Don't be quick to judge (Huwag padalos-dalos paghusga).

On the other hand, the words of our Lord Jesus are not meant to forbid us from correcting sinners, but they remind us to be gentle and compassionate. I remember a mother's testimony who said, "don't discipline your children because of your anger or have authority over them. Do it because of your love. But make sure that you have poured out your love over them before you discipline; otherwise, you don't have the right to do it. It's simple yet profound wisdom we ought to learn and grow day in and day out, not just for our families but in our dealings with others. ("Mahalin mo muna ng lubusan, otherwise, wala kang karapatang mag-disiplina.")

Second, Jesus' attention to the woman. He remained with the woman. There was no harsh judgment nor condemnation. He said, "woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "Neither do I condemn you" (cf. Jn 8:10-11). We see Jesus' gentleness and attentiveness to the misery of the woman. We see mercy meets misery, and mercy is mending misery. Discernibly, God not only hears the cry of those in misery, but he also cries with them. There is always hope for sinners. God shows his mercy and offers forgiveness to those who recognize that they are sinners and beg for his mercy. Isn't it Jesus said, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance" (Lk 15:7). If there is no more forgiveness for the sinner, it is not God who runs out of forgiveness; the sinner turns his gaze away from God. God is a loving God, and He is always waiting for us to return to Him. When we are repentant of our sins, he offers renewed and refreshed life, joy, and gladness of heart. They are incredibly gratuitous graces because of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, which the prophets of the Old Testament can only prophesy and provide imagery or analogy. As Prophet Isaiah said, "something new that God will do in the future; he will make a way in the desert, provide water, and rivers in the wasteland for his people to drink (cf. Is 43:19).

Third, Jesus' command to the woman. Jesus commanded her, "Go, from now on do not sin anymore" (Jn 8:11). Freed from the misery of sin, she is now to live God's mercy, that is, to live a life of a redeemed person, avoiding the near occasion of sin and witnessing God's mercy. With this, she was given a mission, "GO." It is a word of

mission-sending. I find this command parallels the mission-sending at the end of the Mass, "Ite missa est," that is, "Go, you are sent." Just as she received mercy, so she is to give; just as she's forgiven, she's sent to forgive; just as she was loved beyond measure, she is to witness. It is the same for all of us! For Christ has taken possession of us and claimed each as a child of our heavenly Father (cf. Phil 8:1-11).

As we journey toward Holy Week, we journey in God's mercy and towards mercy, the Easter glory. Like the woman, we all have sinned and deserved punishment, but we can be confident that God's mercy will meet us, in particular, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And most especially through the Holy Eucharist, which we are invited to remember, memorialize, and proclaim. His mercy is freely given to us. It grows within ourselves, but it doesn't stay there. It is meant to be shared. It goes out to encounter others and that we may become his mercy, his joy. "Go, you are sent!"

God bless you!

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